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Culturalized Heterogeneities: Comparing Race and Religion in Germany and the U.S.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss in a comparative perspective the role of race and religion as heterogeneities in Germany and the U.S. Both categories are crucial for the legitimation of symbolic and social boundaries and thus for the (re-)production of social inequalities. We argue that the culturalization of these heterogeneities – the categorization of group differences along cultural markers and thus the ascription of attitudes and behavior to these categories – becomes particularly visible in a cross-national perspective. To develop this argument, we draw on important comparative work that emphasizes the boundary-making processes along the categorization of religion and race. We present and discuss our findings from a cross-national analysis of several heterogeneities, in particular religion and race as salient heterogeneities in Germany and the U.S., respectively. Our approach and findings open up the discussion of race and religion as functional equivalents in processes of culturalization and inequality production in an empirical cross-national comparison. We argue that comparative studies in sociology contribute to a deeper understanding of the cultural determinants of migrants' social inequalities.

1. Introduction: Is Religion like Race?

Inequality, understood as patterned disparities in the distribution of income, wealth, educational credentials, and occupational status, has become one of the most fundamental challenges facing contemporary society across the world. Migration has been identified as a form of redistribution and regulation of global inequality (Piketty 2014: 538) although it also contributes to maintaining old and creating new inequalities (Faist 2019: chapter 3). In the context of migration, cultural heterogeneities have emerged as a set of markers in discussions of inequalities in post-migration processes in both academic research and public debates. This development has come in addition to or even in competition with class-based explanations. In their path-breaking contribution to understanding how cultural differences are constructed and matter for immigrant incorporation and thus also for (in)equalities, Zolberg and Long (1999) suggested that a comparative view helps to shed light on the significant factors. They propose that much political conflict in Europe is played out on religious grounds, in particular with reference to Islam, while in the U.S. it is language, namely Spanish, which serves as a boundary-defining membership in immigration states, with membership referring to belonging and status in a national state but also in culturally-defined non-state groups.

This nexus between the politicization of culture in processes relating to the production and maintenance of boundaries – culturalization – on the one hand, and social inequalities on the other hand, has been one of the most productive but also vexing issues in the social sciences. Culturalization is here understood as the categorization of group differences along cultural markers such as ethnicity, race, or religion, and thus the ascription of attitudes and behavior to these categories by non-immigrant groups in the immigration society but also by immigrant groups themselves. This, in turn, has implications for boundaries between groups and the (re-) distribution of material and immaterial resources (Lamont and Molnár 2002).

Much of the literature on immigrant groups and inequalities perceives of migration – often operationalized as migrants hailing from a specific country of origin and their (ascribed) ethnicity – as an independent factor that affects unequal outcomes of desirable goods. Here, we take a different approach. Rather than conceiving of migrants as a homogenous entity identified by country-of-origin ethnicity, we conceive of newcomers as groups of people with manifold heterogeneities. They are heterogeneous in – for example – age, gender, sexual orientation, class, racial, and religious composition. Here, we focus on the role of two heterogeneities, namely race (Blacks and non-Blacks) and religion (Muslims and non-Muslims). We choose race in the U.S. and religion in Germany because these are the dominant lines of

division in public debates around the consequences of immigration and the role of diversities (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014). In contrast to earlier studies, however, we look at both race and religion in both countries. To be clear: we do not argue that race and/or religion as such are factors causing social inequality. It is rather the ideas attached to them and social action structured by these ideas that shape symbolic and social boundaries which often become relevant for the production and maintenance of inequalities between immigrants and non-migrants.

The U.S. and Germany represent strategic research sites for the endeavor to compare and contrast the historical patterns, dynamics, and determinants of the heterogeneity-boundary-inequality nexus. They constitute very different systems not only with respect to their migration regulatory structures and the national origin of their migrant populations, but also with respect to the configuration of the institutional fields in which social positions are produced and distributed, i.e. schooling, labor markets, housing, etc. Following the “most different systems design” (Przeworski and Teune 1970) as a heuristic, we expect significant differences in the way heterogeneities matter and inequalities are produced, but also with respect to similarities in inequality outcomes. The thrust of the comparison is not countries but what they stand for, namely potentially different modes and mechanisms of culturalization which, in the end, correspond to similar socioeconomic disadvantages along factors such as income, wealth, occupational status, and education.

In the analysis to follow, we do not carry out a fully-fledged analysis of the social construction of boundaries around the heterogeneities of race and religion. Instead, first, we use the insights of this literature in order to derive a proposition as to the role of race and religion in the U.S. and Germany, respectively, with regard to symbolic boundary-making. We discern what can be learned from mostly qualitative empirical studies focusing on the social construction of relevant boundaries out of heterogeneities such as race and religion. We find that, to some degree, the culturalization of race and religion might be seen as functional equivalents of some sort when it comes to the (re-)production of symbolic boundaries. Second, as to social boundaries, which build on symbolic ones, the analysis looks at how they manifest themselves in ‘objective’ social positions that are reflected in socioeconomic and socio-cultural differences between immigrants and natives and among immigrant groups. The analysis concludes with the urgent claim for more harmonized data sets for cross-national analysis of social inequalities and migration.

2. Boundary-making along Cultural Lines: The Culturalization of Heterogeneities

Ascriptive attributes – like gender, age, race, or citizenship – as well as cultural preferences – such as lifestyle, (political) orientations, or religious preferences – are all individual or group differences that can be described as heterogeneities (Blau 1964). These heterogeneities and their complex interactions are crucial factors for the (re-)production of social inequalities through negatively or positively marked categorizations (Tilly 1998). One meta-mechanism that is at work in this reproduction of social inequalities is the process of boundary-making (Alba and Nee 2003). This insight leads to a focus on boundaries between groups as a result of the culturalization of heterogeneities. In other words, it is the perception of symbolic boundaries which constitute the basis for objectified social boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002: 168-9).

The valuation of certain heterogeneities which result in boundaries is a process that also causes social inequalities because it can lead to a hierarchization of heterogeneities and to positions of inequality, either by discrimination against others or self-exclusion (Faist and Ulbricht 2017). The way in which social inequality is produced through the culturalization of heterogeneities requires detailed research from a historical, institutional, structural, discursive, and individual perspective to trace boundary-making processes (Lamont 1992, Wimmer 2008). A guiding question in social inequality research, therefore, is how culturalized symbolic boundaries turn into objectified social boundaries.

Two heterogeneities that are frequently addressed in discussions of migrants' social inequality are race and religion, which may function as symbolic boundaries resulting in social boundaries (e.g. Alba and Foner 2015). Although those heterogeneities are often presented as objective or ascriptive, it is necessary to study their relevance through a constructivist perspective of culturalization with respect to social stratification because their influence on the (re-)production of social inequalities is based on the understandings and assumptions about these categories which are (re-)constructed in a dynamic way.

Religion plays a different role from a historical perspective as well. In Germany and Western Europe religious differences were used in the past as a legitimate exclusion factor—regularly visible in various religious wars and violence, such as the Crusades, the European Wars of Religion, the Thirty Years War, etc. In addition, Jews faced centuries of exclusion, persecution, and homicide in Europe. Nowadays, Christianity constitutes something of an unmarked

heterogeneity when it comes to social inequalities, whereas religious preferences strongly associated with migration to Europe, especially Islam, have become highly culturalized from both sides, self-descriptions and other-descriptions. The distinction 'Islam' (yes/no) is thus potentially relevant for debates around cultural and political (in)equalities, especially after 9/11 but even earlier in the aftermath of the revolution in Iran (Faist 2019: chapter 8).

Race is another heterogeneity that is highly culturalized, both historically and in the contemporary period, also with respect to immigrants (Waters et al. 2014; Omi and Winant 1986). Boundary-making processes have occurred over the last decades comprising not only phenotypical references but also culturalized ones (Balibar and Wallenstein 1991). This idea has been taken up in current academic and policy discussions about anti-Muslim racism, a concept that does not limit racism to essentialist biologic aspects, but includes cultural elements (Elahi and Khan 2017) and focuses on hierarchies, power structures, and discrimination practices, for example, Hall's (1980) "racism without races." The culturalization of heterogeneities is an important focus for national, transnational, cross-national, and global inequality studies. In our paper we address the cross-national aspects of culturalization resulting in power asymmetries and inequalities through a comparison of the role of race ("racialization") and religion for social inequalities of migrants in the U.S. and Germany, respectively. To generate accurate hypotheses for our analysis, it is crucial to be aware of the peculiarities of the two national states, for instance, when it comes to migration (policies) as well as the historical, institutional, and structural pathways of the categorizations around the heterogeneities race and religion in each country.

3. Comparing Race and Religion in Germany and the U.S.

Previous comparisons which have taken into account the systemic differences between Germany and the U.S. have –mostly dealt with questions of public policy in realms such as education, employment, and immigration regulations (e.g. Faist 1995), or have discussed the different models of citizenship and nationhood in a historical perspective (e.g. Joppke 1996; Kivisto and Faist 2007). Yet research that directly addresses social inequalities with respect to resources (e.g., income) and social position is rare, and is still missing a longitudinal perspective. One of the rare studies comparing Muslims in both countries along socioeconomic lines is Chbib (2010). However, that study is mostly descriptive, comparing mainly Muslims in Germany and the U.S. with respect to size of population, religiosity, migration motives, countries of origin, and socioeconomic integration along indicators such as education, income, labor market integration, occupation, social integration, and language skills.

The U.S. has conceived of itself as an immigration country in the tradition of “white settler colonies” (Hartz 1969), whereas European countries used to be or have conceived of themselves as immigrant-sending countries, although there are important exceptions such as France as a country of immigration since at least the eighteenth century. Comparisons of the U.S. and Western Europe are common in ongoing research on migration, immigrant adaptation, and social inequalities (e.g. Alba and Foner 2014). However, recent studies indicate large differences between European countries when it comes to, for instance, second-generation immigrants (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012) or Muslims (Halm and Sauer 2017). These findings call for an analysis of single countries instead of whole entities like ‘Western Europe,’ and in this respect a comparison between Germany and the U.S. is a strategic one. Although the history and regulations of immigration differ vastly, both countries nowadays are immigration countries, having received large numbers of migrants over the last five to six decades. Several migration streams are comparable (such as low-skilled migration from Turkey and Mexico, respectively, high-skilled migrants and student mobility, refugees, etc.), but the composition of these groups clearly varies in terms of class, gender, age, religious affiliation, etc., within each of the countries, across time, and across the two countries.

The comparison presents significant challenges, not least because of the different history and treatment of the heterogeneity ‘race.’ In Germany, race is a problematic term, since the Nazis (mis)used it for their purposes. Race has rarely been debated in German migration history until recently (Schönwälder 2004). Yet current migration movements, consisting largely of refugees coming from the Middle East and North Africa, may reinforce older patterns of racialization in Germany, and in Europe more generally. The analysis of the colonial past with respect to racialization has only just begun (Bechhaus-Gerst and Zeller 2018). The protests currently taking place in Germany in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement (June 2020) are contributing to the discussion on race in Germany. They might be paving the way for a sophisticated and critical reflection on race and racism. Thus race might become a more important category in future research, but, for the period of our analyses, race is, unlike in the U.S., neither a politically acceptable term, nor has it been a relevant factor in quantitative research on migration and social inequalities. In contrast, race in the U.S. is one of the most important categories when it comes to both public debates and research on social inequalities. It is closely connected to American history (slavery) and has been a salient category for Americans ever since. In Germany, race as social category does not exist in surveys, although social inequalities through racial discrimination are an important issue in Germany as well (Linnemann et al. 2013).

When we look at the Muslim population in Germany and the U.S., we see different reasons and channels for migration. Besides economic reasons and political conflicts, the main reason for immigration to Germany of those calling themselves Muslims has been family reunification, whereas in the U.S. it is education (Chbib 2010). Religion is also historically rooted in relations and arrangements between state and church in Germany (Foner 2015). The interwoven character of state and church in Germany becomes visible through the dominance of churches compared to mosques, the funding of Christian schools, and Christian holidays, leading to a “second-class status of Islam” (Foner and Alba 2018). In the U.S., the separation of state and church and the shift of religion to the private sphere have resulted in a more equal treatment of all religious communities. In Germany, Christians are officially registered as members of their churches and have to pay taxes etc. In contrast to this formal membership, there is no official registration of Muslims. The different historical and institutional roots in the U.S. are also visible in the way respondents are asked about religion in surveys: it is predominantly framed as a preference. The common perception about religion in the U.S. is that religiosity is a matter for the private sphere, providing immigrants accepted spaces to develop their own religious communities (Alba and Foner 2014). There is greater tolerance of religious pluralism in the U.S., and different forms of religion are considered more ‘morally’ acceptable than atheism (Edgell et al. 2006). Although there have always been discussions about the hierarchization and culturalization of religion in the U.S., for instance, in connection with the election of President John F. Kennedy or in the intersection between race and religion with President Barack Obama, in comparison to Europe, scholars argue that there is no institutionalization of one dominant religion in the U.S. (Foner 2015). Thus, there is no dominant religion among immigrants threatening a (potentially) mainstream religion of the autochthonous (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012). Data from the PEW research center show that 68 percent of all immigrants coming to the U.S. are Christians, followed by 20 percent non-religious, 15 percent “nothing in particular,” and 12 percent non-Christian faith, including 4 percent Muslims (PEW, 2019a).

In Germany, Christianity is often publicly mentioned as a main societal “Leitbild” (guiding concept). Christianity is the established religion, although there are tentative and first steps toward an incorporation of confessions such as Islam (Faist 2019: chapter 8). These tendencies, together with claims-making on the part of Islamic organizations, are so powerful that they have led to an “islamization” of the immigration debate in Germany (Karakayali 2010) to the extent that immigration and Islam have become almost synonymous over the past two to three decades. Although Christianity is still the most popular religion in the U.S. as well as in Germany, immigrants’ religion is not (yet) perceived to be as threatening in the U.S. as it is in Western Europe. On the one hand, religion in the U.S. in general is more diverse than in

Western Europe and the unifying element seems to be religiosity as such – no matter what religion – rather than one explicit religion. Therefore, “becoming more religious is a way of becoming American” (Foner and Alba 2018: 28). Simply put, for some time now religious activities and belonging have been an accepted means to gain entry into the U.S. societal mainstream (Herberg 1955). Research by the PEW institute showed that the frequency of prayer in the U.S. – in comparison to other countries with a similar level of economic development – is much higher (PEW 2019b). Given this state of affairs, religiosity in the U.S. might be a helpful instrument rather than a barrier to integration. In Europe, on the other hand, religion is much more visible in public due to the connection between state and church and, in addition, there is a large share of immigrants belonging to a religion (Islam) that differs from the mainstream. The blurring of religion (Islam) and migration in Germany are connected to feelings of threat. In the U.S., on the other hand, threat is perceived through one striking politicized characteristic attributed to many immigrants, namely the Spanish language, which is thought by nativists to threaten a unifying element of the U.S. population: the (English) language (Zolberg and Long 1999). Current debates around the so-called “Muslim ban” may undermine this assumption, as religion seems to be becoming more important in the U.S. nowadays. Nevertheless, there have been substantial differences between threat perceptions associated with immigration in Germany and the U.S. In Germany, Islam can be described as an internal threat, since the debates focus on defending (‘secular’) values like gender equality, Muslim practices such as female clothing or ritual animal slaughtering, and radicalization. Islam is thus sometimes perceived as an “enemy from within” in public debates in Germany (Foner and Alba 2018: 25), whereas, in the U.S., Islam was portrayed as an external threat (terrorism) in the aftermath of 9/11. More recently, the Trump Administration has cast Islam also as an internal threat.

In short, religious minority groups enjoy less public acceptance in Germany compared to the U.S., while race is a main integration barrier in the U.S. (Foner 2015; Zolberg and Long 1999). Being Black in the U.S. and Muslim in Germany means belonging to a marked group – compared to unmarked Whiteness and unmarked Christianity. This does not mean, however, that religion in the U.S. and race in Germany would not matter for the life chances of immigrants. The observation made here is simply that religion (Islam) in the U.S. and race in Germany have not mattered as much in public debates around immigration.

4. Main Characteristics of Muslims and Blacks in Germany and the U.S.

Muslims (Muslim Immigrants)

A general trend in the religion and migration nexus is that a large proportion of immigrants coming to Germany come from regions with an Islamic majority culture, whereas most immigrating into the U.S. are Christians; thus, religious differences are more salient in Germany (Alba and Foner 2014). There are many more Muslims in Germany (in total) than in the U.S., which means the percentage share of Muslims in Germany is even higher, compared to the U.S. (Chbib 2010). The ethnic background of most Muslims in Germany is Turkish, whereas in the U.S. there is no dominant nationality among Muslims (Chbib 2010). The high share of Muslims migrating from Turkey led to an ethnicization of Muslims in Germany for quite some time (Chbib 2010). Just recently, with many refugees coming to Germany from the Near East, that ethnicization has diminished. Refugees from the Middle East, however, have contributed to the perception of Islam as the main characteristic of immigration. Interestingly, native U.S. Muslims frequently affiliate with “Black Muslims” or “Nation of Islam,” a congregation in which race and Islamic religion intersect (Rashid 2013). In the U.S., Muslims tend to be as observant as the (rather religious) mainstream, whereas in Germany Muslims who are highly religious stand out from the majority (Chbib 2010).

Muslims in the U.S. have a higher educational background than Muslims in Germany, as well as a significantly higher educational and social background than the largest immigrant group (Hispanics) in the U.S. (Chbib 2010, Foner 2015). Turks in Germany – a group with a high share of the Muslim population – have a comparatively low educational background (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012). The high school dropout rate among second-generation Turks in Germany is much higher than average, which in turn leads to high unemployment rates among this group (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012). Labor market integration and occupation also vary: Muslims in the U.S. have average employment rates (especially good rates for those who have been residing in the U.S. for longer periods), whereas the numbers in Germany are slightly lower than average (Chbib 2010). Many Muslims in Germany are employed in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations (mostly working class), but this situation is changing. In comparison to Germany, Muslims in the U.S. occupy mostly higher occupational status positions (as professionals) (Chbib 2010, Zolberg and Long 1999). Education and occupation also influence income: Muslims in Germany are less wealthy in comparison to non-Muslim families (but this varies widely); in the U.S. the family income of Muslims and non-Muslims is comparable (Chbib 2010). Turks in Germany and Mexicans/Dominicans as well as African Americans in the U.S. tend to have low socioeconomic status (Alba and Foner 2014; Chbib

2010). In addition, social mobility in Germany for second-generation Turks can be described as low (Crul and Mollenkopf 2012). All told, Muslims in the U.S. have higher socioeconomic status than Muslims in Germany (Chbib 2010), and, as a consequence, Muslims in Germany are much more at risk of being perceived as socially weak than are Muslims in the U.S.

Blacks (Black Immigrants)

Like Muslims in Germany, Blacks in the U.S. – overall, not just Black immigrants – show signs of deprivation when it comes to important socioeconomic factors like education, income, poverty risk, and (un)employment. For the last five decades, compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Asians, and Hispanics, Blacks in the U.S. have had the lowest median household income. Their median household income has been far below average and, for instance, only half of the median household income of Asians.¹ In addition, Blacks face the highest poverty risk among all groups considered in the U.S. Census. In 2017, 21.2 percent of the Black population in the U.S. was living below the poverty line. In comparison, only 8.7 percent of non-Hispanic Whites were considered to be living in poverty in 2017.² A similar imbalance can be observed regarding education. In 2015, 87 percent of the Blacks in the U.S. aged 25 and older had a high school degree (non-Hispanic Whites: 93.3 percent). And it becomes even clearer with respect to a bachelor's degree: only 22.5 percent of the Black population holds a bachelor's degree, whereas 36.2 percent of non-Hispanic Whites and a remarkable 53.9 percent of Asians have a bachelor's degree.³ In addition, between 1992 and 2015 Blacks had consistently higher school dropout rates among 16- to 24-year-olds compared to Whites.⁴ Furthermore, the unemployment rates for the third quarter of 2018 (16 years and older) reveal that Whites (3.4 percent) and Asians (3.3 percent) are below average (3.9 percent) and Blacks/African Americans (6.5 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (4.5 percent) are above average.⁵ In sum, Blacks in the U.S., in comparison to non-Hispanic Whites and also Asians, seem to be more likely to live in poverty, be less educated, have a lower household income, and have higher unemployment rates.

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2018): Income and Poverty in the United States 2017. Current Population Reports. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf>.

² Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2018): Income and Poverty in the United States 2017. Current Population Reports. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.pdf>.

³ Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2016): Educational Attainment in the United States 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>.

⁴ Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2017): Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017051.pdf>.

⁵ Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm.

Race, as an analytical vector of immigration in the U.S., constitutes a huge gap in the migration literature. The literature focuses mostly on Black Caribbean immigrants, and mainly on persons from Jamaica and Haiti. What dominates the field is ethnicity, as measured by people's nationality or country of origin. The prevalent assumption is that people coming from the same country constitute a homogeneous ethno-racial collective; racial heterogeneity has not been sufficiently addressed in existing studies. However, recent qualitative research has documented the significance of race and racialization for immigrants' incorporation in the U.S. (Telles et al. 2011). In sum, when distinctions along race have been used, they tend to homogenize, comparing all Blacks to all Hispanics, or Whites, disregarding immigration status.

There is a marked contrast between native African Americans and Black immigrants (Waters et al. 2014). Compared to native African Americans, Black immigrants have somewhat higher rates of socioeconomic success. Recent immigration seems to reify boundaries along racial lines, as Asians and Latinos (in grossly generalized assessments) show much less social distance from Whites than do Blacks, both immigrants and natives (Lee and Bean 2007). As Greer (2013) notes, recent immigrants, including also African immigrants and Black Caribbean immigrants, often seek to distance themselves from African Americans. Black Caribbean immigrants, for example, have asserted ethnic country-of-origin identities rather than a racial identity as Black Americans (Waters et al. 2014: 372).

Overall, immigrants from African countries tend to have relatively high levels of education, but this is not necessarily reflected in their socioeconomic performance. Black Caribbean immigrants, who tend to be concentrated on the East Coast, especially in the New York City metropolitan area, have lower levels of education, higher levels of poverty, and more female-headed households than U.S.-born, non-Hispanic Whites. Nonetheless, Black Caribbean immigrants tend to earn more than African immigrants, holding levels of education constant (Thomas 2012; Capps et al. 2012). And while their offspring tend to acquire higher levels of education than the first generation, they are outperformed by other second-generation immigrants, particularly Asians, Europeans, and South Americans. Yet they do much better than their Hispanic Caribbean counterparts (Dominicans and Puerto Ricans) in the New York City metropolitan area. The exception to the racial blindness in the field, however, is an analysis that takes Latin American immigrants as if they were a homogeneous group (Hispanics) for whom race does not matter (Villareal and Tamborini 2018).

In sum, while 'race' and 'religion' can be used as variables, it is the underlying processes of boundary-making that matter. In a longitudinal analysis of immigrant groups' inequalities (1900-2010), Guarnizo and Becerra (2016) find that, after controlling for conventional socio-

demographic determinants (i.e., gender, age, education) and regional location, race and ethnicity appear to be highly significant factors that structure socioeconomic inequality within and between immigrant groups. Their most surprising finding has to do with what they call the racialization of inequality. In particular, they found a strong tendency toward racialization of Latin American immigrants, making them more likely to have lower socioeconomic status, live in poverty, be unemployed, and have lower household incomes.

These empirical results open up the proposition that the processes of racialization – here discussed under the common denominator ‘culturalization’ as a boundary-making meta-mechanism – share a common characteristic: it is the devaluation of groups who are ascribed such heterogeneities and who, in turn, may also adopt these heterogeneities in their self-description.

When it comes to Black immigrants in Germany, there is no quantitative socio-structural information about that group, because it is not covered as a variable in surveys. This is why we do not know any statistical outcomes, when it comes to unequal positions with respect to education, employment, income, and wealth. Studies about Blacks in Germany are more about (youth) identity, (transnational) identification, as well as discourses around Blackness, and do not cover more “materialistic” perspectives on social inequality (e.g. Broden and Mecheril 2010, Sow 2018).

5. Practical Challenges: Theory-driven Hypotheses vs. Insufficient Database

Based on the previous theoretical concepts and empirical literature review, we present the following hypothesis for our empirical analysis:

“Black” in the U.S. and “Muslim” in Germany have a significant negative effect on the social status of the groups categorized along these lines (e.g. ISEI⁶; income, poverty risk, etc.).

Besides “Black/Muslim,” all other variables in our model are the same; and therefore we could speak of total equivalency. Ideally, we could compare Muslims’ social positions in

⁶ International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status.

Germany and the U.S. and also the social position of Blacks in both countries. For this purpose, we would need to build four identical models (Blacks Germany, Blacks U.S., Muslims Germany, Muslims U.S.).

To test the hypothesis we looked for different data sets and faced the following problems:

- With the data available, we are not able to conduct analyses that contain identical models for the U.S. and Germany. ‘Ethnicity/race’ is a common and important variable in the U.S., often included in studies of social inequalities. In contrast, we do not have any data on race in Germany due to factors discussed previously. Therefore, race/ethnicity is not included in quantitative research on social inequalities in Germany. Harmonized data sets like the LIS or the Cross-National Equivalent File (CNEF) do not contain the necessary data. These data sets are based on national surveys such as the GSOEP which – again – do not provide information on race. Even though a variable ‘race’ exists, it does not contain (adequate) content for Germany. Harmonized data sets like the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) contain a variable called ‘ethnicity/race,’ which provides information on “cultural, racial, religious, or linguistic characteristics, origin, or classification.” The diversity within this variable can be seen as an indicator for the difficulties of measuring ‘race’ in Germany. The possible content of this variable is described as follows: “White, African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian origin, Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race), multiracial/mixed/interracial, language, indigenous populations, identity not country-related” (LIS Codebook). It is therefore not possible to include ‘race’ in the German models.
- In addition, we encountered considerable difficulties regarding religion in the U.S. In general, religion seems to be rather unimportant in the U.S. data collections compared to Germany. Census data, for instance, do not contain information in religion. Other surveys such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) ask for “religious or spiritual belief” and “religious preference” instead of ‘belonging’ (which would be the question in Germany). The PSID, for instance, offers the response ‘Muslim (Islam).’ However, we cannot use this category for our analysis. According to the Codebook 2017, 174 respondents are “Non-Christian/Muslim/Buddhist/Rastafarian, etc. Apart from the fact that Muslims are grouped together with other religious groups such as Buddhists, the number of observations seems to be quite small. The same applies for the data of the General Social Survey (GSS). Only 19 of the 2,849 respondents identified themselves as Muslims.

In sum we have satisfactory data on race/ethnicity for the U.S. but not for Germany. For Germany, we have very good data on religion. In case of the GSOEP Migration Sample, the number of Muslims is large enough to include this category in our model.

- We do not want to use data on Muslims only (e.g. PEW or Gallup provide some information on Muslims) because we look at social inequalities in society and therefore want to compare Muslims and non-Muslims. In addition, we would need a data set that includes information on, at least, socioeconomic status, income, education, gender, age, marital status, country of birth, and number of children.
- We need a larger number of Muslims in established surveys. This might be challenging due to the fear among Muslims “that polling calls are disguised surveillance practices, which not only increase anxiety but also depress response rates and compliance” (Calfano et al. 2019: 477).

6. What We Did Instead: Data and Methods

Based on the idea of a partial functional equivalence of race in the U.S. and religion (Muslim) in Germany, the comparison focuses on these two categories. In order to conduct most similar regression models with the data available in the U.S. and Germany, we decided to use data from the German Socioeconomic-Panel (GSOEP) and the U.S.-American General Social Survey (GSS). Both data sets provide the same measures for relevant variables such as gender, age, education, place of birth, and household composition. In addition, they feature detailed variables on religion (Germany) and race (U.S.). For the aforementioned reasons, we do not have quantitative data regarding race in Germany. This stands in stark contrast to the data available on race in comparison to the U.S. In turn, data sets from the U.S. often lack detailed variables on religious affiliation of Muslims. Data from the GSOEP and the GSS (both 2016) allow for a nearly identical model with race and religion as functional equivalents and ISEI (International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status, range: 16-90) as a dependent variable. This model can be considered as a minimal model, containing only those variables that are measured in exactly the same way in Germany and the U.S. The sample size is the following: Muslims in Germany: N=12,848; and Blacks in the U.S.: N = 2,728.

6. Preliminary Empirical Findings

In Germany, people who identify themselves as Muslims have a significantly lower ISEI than non-Muslims ($p < 0.001$). This means that, with the same education, same age, same family conditions, and, controlled by gender, being foreign-born or not, Muslims in Germany still have a 5-point lower ISEI than non-Muslims. In the U.S., being Black, compared to not being Black (Whites, Others), has a significant impact on one's ISEI. On average, Blacks have an ISEI that is 2.4 points lower than the ISEI of non-Blacks.

Other variables we included in our minimal model yielded the following results: Education, as expected, has a strong effect on one's ISEI ($p < 0.001$). In Germany as well as in the U.S., a high level of education has a positive impact on the ISEI. Having at least a high school degree increases the ISEI significantly (GER: 7.2/U.S.: 6.2). For an education level above high school, the effect is even stronger (GER: 25.1/U.S.: 18.9).

Age is a significant predictor of social position in both countries as well. Higher biological age decreases the ISEI ($p < 0.001$) in Germany and increases it in the U.S. Gender is a relevant category only in Germany, where women's ISEI is significantly lower than men's (-2.1). In the U.S., we can observe the same tendency but this effect is not significant.

In Germany, marital status influences one's ISEI. Being married leads to a significantly higher ISEI compared to being divorced or widowed ($p < 0.05$). Those who have never been married do not differ significantly compared to those who are married when it comes to their social position. In the U.S., the effect of a person's marital status on the ISEI is stronger than in Germany. Being married improves the ISEI significantly (more than 4 points) compared to "never been married" and other forms (divorced, widowed etc.). Unsurprisingly, the fact of having children also decreases the ISEI significantly in Germany (-2.1). Interestingly, the effect of having children or not is not significant in the U.S.

Being born abroad leads to a significantly lower ISEI (-2.2) in Germany. This means that the experience of immigration is highly relevant for migrants in Germany and can be regarded as a serious disadvantage for their ISEI. Being born outside of the U.S., in comparison, does not affect the ISEI significantly, although the tendency does point in the same negative direction.

For the German case, we have a parsimonious model. R^2 is comparatively high (0.35) and indicates that those variables are good indicators that determine socioeconomic position. In the U.S., R^2 is a bit lower (0.24). Gender, as well as having children and being born abroad, does not influence the ISEI significantly.

All in all, our models show similar patterns for being Muslim in Germany and being Black in the U.S. Controlling for gender, age, education, marital status, having children or not, and being foreign-born or not, Muslim and Black participants still show significantly lower ISEIs compared to their non-Muslim and non-Black counterparts, respectively.

Table 1: Linear regression model with GSOEP respective GSS data from 2016 (dependent variable ISEI)

	Germany	USA
sex ^a	-2.13***	-0,96
education ^b		
high school	7.24***	6.22***
more than high school	25.10***	18.88***
Age	-0.08***	0.10***
children ^c	-2.11***	-0,46
marital status ^d		
never been married	-0,96	-4.76***
other	-1.33**	-4.56***
foreign born ^e	-2.28***	-1.11
Muslim ^f	-5.00***	
Black ^g		-2.35***
R ²	34,91%	23,70%
N	12848	2728

Notes: a: ref. is male; b: ref. is primary and secondary education; c: ref is no children; d: ref. is married; e: ref. is first generation; f: ref. is non-Muslim; g: ref is non-Black; *: p <= 0.05; **: p<= 0.01; ***: p <= 0.001; data source for Germany: GSOEP, own calculations; data source for USA: GSS, own calculations.

We also used the GSOEP and GSS data for further analysis of unequal social status and positions of Muslims in Germany and Blacks in the U.S., respectively. All multivariate models

(that included the same independent variables as in the models described before) show that Muslims/Blacks have lower household incomes and also higher risks of poverty or belong to the group of people with under-average income.⁷ All these findings indicate that both heterogeneities are highly relevant for various aspects of social inequalities in the respective country. Unfortunately, these dependent variables could not be operationalized in exactly the same way, so that we cannot speak about equivalence in the sense as it was presented for the ISEI.

7. Discussion and Ways Ahead

Our analysis is – as far as we know – the only study that has tried to compare equivalence regarding cultural heterogeneities and their implications for socioeconomic status in the U.S. and Germany with empirical quantitative data. But there is still a long way to go. To test the hypotheses of race and religion being functional equivalents or at least an auxiliary construct, it would be helpful to build more complex models (add more independent variables, build models with other dependent variables) to compare patterns. Our very preliminary findings indicate a potential equivalence of ‘race’ and ‘religion’ in the respective country contexts. But it is by no means total equivalence, because there are other independent variables which do not necessarily converge. Nonetheless, despite all the difficulties encountered, we still think that it is fruitful to look at the different ways heterogeneities in different migration contexts are culturalized.

Toward that goal, there is an urgent need for more comparable data on race and religion for comparative migration and social inequality studies. One way ahead would be closer cooperation among survey designers, especially with regard to the dependent variable, i.e. more comparable measures for social status. Harmonization on the dependent variable should not take place after the fact, but needs to be addressed at the design stage of surveys (e.g., uniform formulation of questions, uniform scales). Also, in the U.S., large-scale surveys should try to oversample Muslim population in order to gain more empirically-based knowledge

⁷ With respect to income, Muslim men in Germany have a significantly lower Household Net Equivalence Income than non-Muslim men (-566 Euro). For men, the strong effect of being Muslim on their Household Net Equivalence Income is remarkable, because it is even stronger than the effect of being born abroad (-142 Euro), having children (-247 Euro), and never have been married (-239 Euro). Muslim men are 3.8 times more likely to live in poverty than their non-Muslim counterparts ($p < 0.001$). In the U.S., Blacks' household income is 8000 dollars lower than non-Blacks' household incomes.

about this population. Ideally, this question could be added to the U.S. Census. For the reasons elaborated above, adding race to questionnaires in the German context comes with some problems, not least in terms of appropriate terminology: should we adapt the English term “race” or find an adequate German translation? Yet we cannot overlook the fact that there is rampant racial discrimination in Germany as well which needs to be addressed in quantitative research. Moreover, we should try to think about more subtle ways to measure the perception of difference, how social boundaries work in practice, and how strong they are.

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